

Memorandum



Date: November 6, 2007

Agenda Item No. 12(B)4

To: Honorable Chairman Bruno A. Barreiro
and Members, Board of County Commissioners

From: George M. Burgess
County Manager

Subject: Report on Recertification Initiative for MDHA Section 8 Families

We have made significant progress in improving processes and services to clients of the Miami Dade Housing Agency (MDHA). One of the critical issues the Agency faced was the completion of federally required annual recertifications for Section 8 participants that in many cases were months or years behind schedule.

As of January 2007, MDHA had a backlog of 60 percent, totaling approximately 6,800 families not in compliance out of nearly the 12,000 families in the program. This finding was significant due to the fact that each month more recertifications become due in the Section 8 program, averaging nearly 1,000 per month.

MDHA focused on completing these recertifications, which included determining the continued eligibility of and level of financial assistance for Section 8 participants. To bring the recertifications up to date, in a early 2007 a work plan was developed that challenged Section 8 staff to improve production and sustain high productivity levels to reduce the back-log of recertifications.

Historically, Section 8 staff had difficulty in maintaining the production levels to meet the deadlines. It was found that the inability to meet the production levels was, in part, due to a lack of training, as well as, staffing levels. As a result, the Section 8 staff attended technical training and was required to pass a certification examination. Employees unable to pass the examination after two opportunities were either demoted or separated from employment.

Since January 2007, 23 of the 106 Section 8 employees left the Private Rental Housing Division of MDHA as a result of failing probation, voluntary resignation, transfer, or involuntary removal from their positions, equating to a loss of over 20 percent of the division's staff. In the meantime, vacancies are being filled and existing staff assumed the increased workload. In addition to filling vacancies, private contractors were brought in as a necessary resource to move the task of completing the recertifications forward.

At the time of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (US HUD's) audit review in February, US HUD claimed MDHA had a 85% backlog in recertifications. MDHA challenged the percentage and maintained that the backlog was closer to 36 to 40 percent, with which US HUD later concurred.

With the utilization of private contractors, the effort to complete the recertifications took a two-prong approach. In April 2007, a private contractor began to address the approximately 4,200 outstanding recertifications. At that time, the backlog had reduced from the original 6,800, but significant effort was needed to reduce this to levels were manageable.

Section 8 clients whose recertifications were incomplete from October 2006 through March 2007 were mailed packages with instructions to complete and return recertification documents. In order to ensure that recertification documents were returned and the potential for termination from the Section 8 program was reduced, communication with families was essential. A "1-800" telephone intake center was created to field inquiries from families about the process. Infirm and elderly participants were also able to request a home visit or assistance in completing the packet. A minimum of two notifications were sent out to assure the Section 8 clients were afforded the opportunity to complete the process.

The second part of the initiative was to address recertifications in a proactive manner. A mass recertification effort was instituted at MDHA's central campus for Section 8 clients whose annual recertification was timely and due. A team of Section 8 employees supplemented by other MDHA staff met with Section 8 clients to complete their paperwork for current recertifications. This effort was very well received, as evidenced in exit surveys.

Despite efforts that included multiple mailed notices, notices placed in local newspapers in English, Spanish and Creole, and through efforts that included Commissioners' offices that assisted in referring Section 8 families through the recertification process, approximately 1,300 families failed to respond. A final notice mailed to these families resulted in a large response so that only 154 families were terminated for failing to be recertified at the end of the fiscal year. Families have been and continue to be given an opportunity for due process through a hearing compliant with federal regulations. If it is found that MDHA was in error, staff is prepared to reinstate the family into the program.

As a result of this intensive effort, MDHA is nearly fully caught up on the late recertifications. In fact, as of October 1, 2007, the percentage of backlog of incomplete recertifications has decreased to 0.67 percent, (less than 1 percent).

Completion of recertification is critically important because it is an indicator scored annually by US HUD under SEMAP (Section 8 Management Assessment Program), of which Housing agencies can receive up to 10 points for the recertification indicator. The last year MDHA received points for the recertification indicator was 2004; however due to a hurricane waiver, we did not receive scores for 2005 and 2006, and will not receive a SEMAP score in 2007. Staff feels that if US HUD were to score MDHA through SEMAP this year, it would receive the full 10 points as a result of these increase recertification efforts.

Lastly, we have tested the quality of the recertification process and have found that the tenant files meet the regulatory requirements for the annual recertifications. Quality controls continue to assure that MDHA is compliant with federal regulations.

Moving forward into FY 2007-08, MDHA's goal is to complete recertifications in advance of the recertification date and within the US HUD acceptable standards through a workplan. In addition, the implementation of the housing software upgrade and hiring of line staff will assist in MDHA's efforts to stay current with Section 8 recertifications, along with in-service training of employees.



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